

Books of The Times

By CHARLES POORE

A BILL MAULDIN cartoon held the place of honor in Lieut. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott Jr.'s command post at Anzio. It showed Willie and Joe passing the time of day under shellbursts, with Willie saying: "The hell this ain't the most important hole in the world. I'm in it"—answering Bainsfather's search for the better 'ole once and forever. And Mauldin gave



General Truscott

Truscott his original cartoon. Matter of record, General Truscott tried a spectacular variety of bivouacs in the course of the war. He won the Distinguished Service Cross on the Licata beachhead in Sicily. He had been one of the early American planners in Mountbatten's Commando headquarters in London when we had more mimeographing machines than LST's. He had been at Dieppe. He was part of Patton's Western Task Force in the Moroccan landings. He was in Tunisia during the bitter Kasserine days; in Italy at Salerno. He was to become a corps commander and then commander of an army—and his final assignment was to have been commander of a group of Chinese Armies before peace gleamed fitfully. We all owe a share of the war's outcome to Lucian Truscott. We're lucky he never got too brassy to understand that Mauldin best expressed the spirit of the American citizen in uniform—no matter what paces he put that citizen through.

"Command Missions,"* General Truscott's personal story, is one of the finest and deepest and liveliest memoirs of the war. You often have to exercise your mental muscles in reading it; there are pages where the general takes you relentlessly forward through all kinds of obstacles and screening fire at a pace that closely resembles the famous Truscott Trot that helped American forces to see so much of Sicily. Yet nowhere will you get a better understanding of what went on in England, Africa, Italy, Southern France and the dark early occupation days in Germany.

A Soldier Who Did His Job

The general dished it; the general took it just as well. He looked with a sardonic eye at Patton's race to beat the British to Messina. When Patton raised his shrill voice in monotonous anger at some delay, Truscott bristled back: "General, you know that's ridiculous and insulting. You have ordered the operation and it is now loading. If you don't think I can carry out orders, you can give the Division to anyone you please. But I will tell you one thing, you will not find anyone who can carry out orders which they do not approve as well as I can." Many months later, Truscott was to supplant Patton himself as commander of the Third Army in Germany. In doing so he was, ironically, carrying out orders with reluctance.

Again, although General Truscott served Gen. Mark Clark loyally in Italy, it is made candidly clear that Clark was never one of Truscott's ungovernable admirations. Yet he praised Clark when he thought he could do so wholeheartedly. And he always did his best to get along smoothly with his British and French

Allies—demanding as Montgomery and de Lattre de Tassigny could be on occasion.

No one has expressed the American regard for Field Marshal Alexander so well as General Truscott. Alexander, he writes, "had all the personality and drive of Patton and Montgomery, without any of their flamboyance. He had the intellect and astute diplomatic skill of Eisenhower. Alexander was, in my opinion, outstanding among the Allied leaders."

The theory that women have no place on a battlefield is sound, humane, chivalric. It should not, however, overlook the heroic service of the nurses. "No one who served at Anzio," General Truscott says, "will ever forget the gallantry of the medical personnel there, particularly the Army nurses. None of them had expected to work under artillery fire or air bombardment, for they were protected by the Geneva Convention. Hospitals were usually established in areas well beyond the range of German artillery. At Anzio there were no safe regions; every part was within the range of German guns. Because the beach and port were the primary targets for German air and long-range artillery, the forward positions were usually quieter and safer than rear areas except during periods of actual offensive operations. Thus, doctors, nurses and Corps men worked under the tensions of battle and suffered the same hardships as did the front-line troops."

Obeying a Nurse Under Fire

One day an irate chief nurse approached General Truscott, who had just taken command of all forces (or almost all) at Anzio, and bawled the living daylights out of him. She was holding a huge shell fragment in each hand. The lethal metal objects were thrust under the general's nose.

"These came through my tent when I was in bed," she said. "We can't take care of our patients properly unless we can get some rest. I want to know what you are going to do about it."

The general sandbagged the place as best he could. Hell, he realized, hath no fury like a woman shelled.

Was the Allied landing in Southern France justified? Twenty-twenty hindsight, General Truscott suggests, tells us that we would have been much stronger politically in the post-war years if we had given less attention to Southern France and more attention to a drive from Italy up into the Balkans. At the time, however, we didn't believe we had the resources to mount two major all-out efforts in Europe at the same time. And there were many weeks when we had our hands full anyway, at that.

General Truscott's final word here is a tribute to the American soldier, the man in Bill Mauldin's drawings:

"The American soldier did not like war. He dreaded the uncertainty, danger and hardship. He was rather resentful of military discipline and its interference with his individual liberties. He hated the monotony of military training and the physical effort it required. When asked why he was fighting, the answer was as often as not: 'Because I have to.' He may not have known just why he was in Africa, or Italy, or elsewhere, but he appreciated well enough why he was fighting. War had been forced on the country at Pearl Harbor; like others, he had to do his part toward winning it. Disliking war, discipline, training, discomfort and hardship, the American soldier accepted them philosophically as aspects of a disagreeable task to which he applied his native ingenuity and resourcefulness. The American soldier demonstrated that, properly equipped, trained and led, he had no superior among the armies of the world."

*COMMAND MISSIONS. By Lucian K. Truscott Jr. With maps and charts. 370 pages. Dutton. \$7.50.

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